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ABSTRACT

In an effort to reduce the current epidemic of gun violence among children and adolescents in the United States, this fact sheet presents various approaches to reducing access to and interest in carrying firearms. Suggested approaches to reducing access include: (1) urging parents to turn in their guns to police; (2) repealing anti-gun control legislation; (3) making illegal gun trafficking a priority for local law enforcement; (4) increasing fees for gun licenses; and (5) establishing confidential hotlines to report students carrying guns at school. Methods offered for reducing young peoples' desire to carry and use firearms include: (1) teaching parents and children to channel anger without resorting to violence; (2) teaching at-risk youth effective conflict resolution methods; (3) increasing availability of mental health services; (4) providing safe places for youth to congregate; and (5) reducing the glorification of violence in the media. Includes ways of assessing the true cost of gun violence. (RB)

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Firearm Facts

PREVENTING CHILD AND ADOLESCENT FIREARM INJURIES

There is an urgent need for violence prevention initiatives that educate Americans about three critical facts.

1. Instead of increasing your safety, a gun in your home increases the chances that you or a loved one will be killed, injured, or commit suicide. A gun in the home is 43 times more likely to kill a family member or friend than to be used in self defense.[1]

2. Programs that punish gun violence after the fact have not prevented the current epidemic of gun violence, and will not prevent the bulk of future violence. Initiatives to prevent gun violence need to be developed, tested and implemented.

3. Violence is linked very closely to poverty. Programs that effectively address the root causes and the impact of poverty also should reduce violence.[2,3]

To prevent the current epidemic of gun violence by children and youth, we must reduce their access to firearms and their interest in carrying and using firearms.

Programs need to specifically address the sources of guns that get into the hands of children and adolescents: parents, friends, legal and illegal gun dealers, and residents or dealers who are robbed.

Representatives from schools, health care programs, religious institutions, parents' organizations, mental health and social services programs, law enforcement, juvenile justice, policymakers and the media all are important players in preventing the tragedy of child and adolescent firearm deaths and injuries.

Whatever approach to preventing gun violence you take, evaluate your efforts.
Evaluation of your program from the very beginning will improve your chances of success, increase acceptance of effective solutions to gun violence, and encourage sustained support for programs that work.

Many approaches to reducing gun violence offer promise.

Across the country, individuals and organizations are trying a wide variety of approaches to prevent gun violence. The following examples of some of these strategies may be applicable in your community as well.

Approaches to reduce children's and adolescents' access to firearms:

- Urge parents who keep a handgun in their home to turn it in to a police department that melts firearms down. If they will not remove the handgun from their home, educate them about the importance of storing unloaded firearms and ammunition in separate, locked locations.

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- Train professionals in the school, health, mental health, social service, juvenile justice and law enforcement fields to discuss the danger of handguns in the home with parents and adolescents.

- Require all police agencies to melt down firearms that have been confiscated in the course of police work or decommissioned by the police agency rather than sell them.

- Repeal state laws which prohibit or preempt local government from enacting firearms legislation that is more restrictive than existing state statutes.

- Obtain case-by-case exemptions from state "preemption laws" for individual cities and counties.

- Enforce existing federal, state and local laws and regulations regarding the manufacture, sale and possession of guns.

- Make cracking down on illegal gun trafficking a priority for local law enforcement.

- Establish a significant annual fee for a gun dealer license.

- Establish strict licensing and storage standards for gun manufacturers, sellers, and owners.

- Require gun dealers to carry a designated amount of liability insurance.

- Establish liability for the manufacture and sale of guns so that those who profit from guns share in the cost of gun-related deaths and injuries.

- Make it illegal to transfer a handgun to anyone visibly under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

- Disqualify anyone convicted of a charge of assault, child abuse, or domestic partner abuse, or any person subject to a civil protection order, from obtaining a handgun permit.

- Establish criminal penalties for adult gun owners whose unsafe firearm storage methods result in death, injury, or firearms being taken to school.

- Delay driving privileges for juveniles convicted of possessing a handgun.

- Ban any person from obtaining handgun ammunition without a handgun license.

- Mandate safety features for guns such as trigger locks and loading indicators.

- Ban the manufacture and sale of assault weapons.
- Ban particularly hazardous and non-sporting forms of ammunition.
- Evaluate the costs and benefits of using metal detectors at schools and/or other community sites.
- Establish confidential hotlines to report students carrying guns at school.
- Experiment with gun buy-back programs.

Approaches to reduce children's and adolescents' interest in carrying and using firearms:

- Teach parents and children of all ages how to channel their anger and resolve conflicts without resorting to violence.
- Teach children and youth in high risk situations, such as those involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, effective conflict resolution methods. Provide counseling to children who have experienced child abuse or have witnessed violence in their homes or communities.
- Increase mental health services available for children and adolescents who are at risk for suicide, have been victims of child abuse, or have witnessed domestic or community violence.
- Screen children and adolescents more broadly and more effectively for serious chronic depression and other risk factors for suicide, and provide referrals to treatment.
- Provide leadership and peer mediation training for children from elementary school through high school.
- Develop mentoring and jobs programs for youth.
- Provide safe places for children and adolescents to congregate and participate in constructive, stimulating, rewarding activities, such as after-school and recreational programs.
- Support programs to reduce poverty by providing jobs, housing and health care within stressed urban areas.
- Reduce the glorification and promotion of violence in the media and in advertisements.

Approaches to assess the true cost of gun violence include:

- Compute the aggregate cost of medical treatment and rehabilitation for gunshot wounds, by city, county, or state, and the proportion of that cost that is borne by public funds.

- Require information on death certificates regarding the type of gun used in a homicide, suicide or unintentional firearm-related death.

- Establish a national firearm fatality reporting system (including make, model, serial number of the weapon) similar to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatal Accident Reporting System.

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